

August 2005

State Senator Jim Barcia



CAPITOL NEWS FOR THE THIRTY-FIRST DISTRICT

Dear Neighbor,

It has been a challenging year in state government. However, I continue to enjoy the privilege of serving as your State Senator and I am optimistic about the future.

With state revenues still running short of anticipated spending, the ability to meet the ever-increasing needs of our citizens is truly daunting. Like a family that must tighten its belt during difficult economic times, I firmly believe that state government must live within its means. We have cut nearly \$3 billion in state spending since 2002 and will cut even more when a final budget is approved for FY 2006. However, as a member of the Appropriations Committee, I understand that we must continue to make the critical investments in K-12 and higher education, economic development, and health care in order to keep and retain jobs in Michigan.

Fortunately, our area has seen some positive developments as of late. I was happy to work closely with the Village of Millington to secure a \$600,000 grant for improvements to their wastewater system. This money will create jobs and avert a potential environmental hazard. In Bay City I helped secure a \$126,000 grant to complete the ambitious reconstruction of Columbus Avenue. And recently I was successful in passing legislation (PA 342 of 2004) which allowed the historic merger of Michigan and Monitor Sugar to proceed, keeping thousands of good-paying jobs here in Michigan.

In the coming months I intend to pursue an ambitious agenda to promote increased investment in our entire area—from urban cities to smaller villages, to townships and farming communities. As always, I will continue to support efforts to improve public safety and protect our seniors, children, and families. I encourage you to stay involved and contact me with your ideas and concerns. Together, we can build a more prosperous future.

With warm regards,

Jim Barcia

State Senator • 31st District

Clip and Save

How To Reach Senator Barcia

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TRANSPORTATION

Feds Increase Highway Funds to Michigan

The U.S. Congress recently passed a bill that increases federal transportation contributions and increases the amount of highway tax dollars returned to the state. Michigan stands to receive \$1.2 billion in new federal money over the next five years. That compares to the current return of \$1.1 billion annually. While the amounts are significant, Michigan's needs are even greater.

Currently, the federal government returns to Michigan 90.5 cents for every dollar paid in highway taxes. State officials use these monies to fund highway projects and other transportation developments. The increase to 92 cents on the dollar would mean an extra \$250 million a year for the next five years.

The one-and-a-half cent increase means better roads, stronger bridges, and a healthier transportation system.

However, Washington's original promise was to return \$1 for every dollar paid in highway taxes. The impact of such a return would be impressive, but, until then, we must hold the federal government to its obligations and wisely use the increased funding and returns we may receive.

As a member of the Michigan State Senate, I will continue to lobby our federal representatives to work for Michigan's fair share of transportation funding.

AMVETS Honored

Earlier this summer the Senate passed my bill to rename the portion of M-46 between M-24 in Tuscola County and M-53 in Sanilac County the "AmVets Memorial Scenic Drive." American Veterans, or AMVETS, is a service organization that provides many support services to our veterans and sponsors various programs to local communities. Members of AMVETS have made great sacrifices for our country through their military service and continue to serve other armed forces members after discharge. It is in honor of these dedicated members of the military that we dedicate the naming of this highway.

Report Gas Gouging

With gas prices at an all-time high, it is important that consumers are protected from any attempt at gouging or price fixing. While the price of a gallon of gas is determined primarily by the international price for oil, there have been situations where unscrupulous businesses take advantage of consumers. If you believe that there is price fixing or gas gouging occurring, contact Attorney General Mike Cox at **1-877-765-8388**. You may also report excessively high gas prices to the U.S. Department of Energy: <http://gaswatch.energy.gov/>



Senator Barcia Meets With 4-H Students From the Thumb

As part of the 4-H Capitol Experience, Senator Barcia takes time to welcome Huron County residents Ona Holz, Alisha Kirsch, and Patrick Murdock, as well as Justin Ives of Van Buren County, to Michigan's Capitol.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Barcia's Bill to Assist Urban Redevelopment Passes Senate

Earlier this year, my bill to expand development of blighted or obsolete properties unanimously passed the Senate. Under current law, commercial property can obtain a property tax

abatement to redevelop certain functionally obsolete properties in core communities. Senate Bill 52 would expand the scope of the credit to include additions to a property. The bill expands local economic

development options and does so without costing the state or local governments any revenue. SB 52 is currently awaiting action in the House of Representatives.

NGRI Bills to be Introduced

In response to an incident in Caro last year where four people were viciously attacked by a patient, I have been working to draft legislation to insure that patients who are found "Not Guilty By Reason of Insanity" (NGRI) be treated in a secure environment. Many of these patients committed serious crimes but are being treated in non-secure local mental health facilities.

I believe that all people with mental illness, regardless of their history, should be afforded quality and compassionate health care. However, in these cases it must be done without jeopardizing the safety of themselves, other patients, the staff, and the general public. Legislation should be ready for introduction in the fall.

Assistance for Sugar Industry

Since returning to the Michigan Senate, I have been at the forefront of promoting and protecting Michigan's sugar industry. I sponsored a resolution (SR 175 of 2003) and have spoken out forcefully to oppose the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which could devastate Michigan's sugar industry. I sponsored and passed SB 1349 (PA 342 of 2004), which paved the way for the merger of Michigan and Monitor Sugar, and have been working with our federal delegation and colleagues in the Michigan Senate to seek relief for sugar beet growers from a disastrous storage season.

Strengthening of Voting Rights

In past elections voters have encountered long lines at many polling sites. We need to find ways to reduce delays and eliminate barriers while encouraging more voters to participate in the democratic process. I have co-sponsored several bills to improve voter access and encourage voter turnout. These bills would allow voting by mail in local and statewide elections; allow Michigan citizens who register

on the same day of an election to also vote in that election, assuming they meet age and residency requirements; allow citizens to vote where they live, for example at their college campus; and eliminate current restrictions for voting absentee and allow no-reason absentee voting. These reforms will improve access and assure that all citizens can exercise their voting rights.



We Are Here to Help

Senator Barcia and his staff are here to help you with any problems you might be experiencing with state government. We help constituents cut through bureaucratic red tape and resolve problems. If you have a concern or a question, please don't hesitate to contact us.



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- ☐ **The Legislative Process in Michigan - A Student's Guide**
Written for high school students and adults.
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- ☐ **A Citizen's Guide to State Government**
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Name _____

Address _____

City _____, MI Zip Code _____ Phone () _____



Senator Barcia Welcomes Contest Winner to Capitol

Senator Barcia with Jacqueline Filsinger and her family of Bay City. Jacqueline is the winner in her age group in the Department of Environmental Quality 2005 Earth Day Poster Contest.